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CULTURE, FOR AND AGAINST: PATTERNS OF “CULTURESPEAK” IN NEW ZEALAND

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Over the last couple of decades, the inhabitants of New Zealand have shown themselves increasingly prepared to deploy the term “culture” and to do so for a wider variety of purposes, in a wider range of rhetorical contexts and more often with a political edge than ever before. In part, this willingness reflects a gradual displacement (not replacement¹) of the terminology of “race”. Such a displacement has been traced by Wetherell and Potter (1992) in their groundbreaking study of the language of racism in New Zealand. Culture, they suggest, has become New Zealanders’ default term of reference for allocating people into meaningful categories of human association and for explaining their subsequent actions. Hence, there is a late 20th century preference for terms such as “bicultural” and “multicultural”, as opposed to “biracial” or “multiracial”.

But the increasing recourse to culture also stems from a growing ingenuity and resourcefulness in *applying* the term “culture” to new purposes and incorporating it into policy discourses. Culture, as a consequence, is invoked not only as a means of justifying redress for discrimination or historical injustice, but also as a standard of accountability by which the upholding of rights (or their suppression) can be measured. My essay attempts to outline developments in this area.

THE ROOTS OF CULTURESPEAK

Rather than *assume* conceptual coherence regarding the notion of culture that such applications appear to share, I propose to analyse them as terms within a broad and open-ended field of “culturespeak”, a concept generally ascribed to Ulf Hannerz (1999). “Culturespeak” is simply a useful cover term for all the ways in which people talk about culture. I did not choose the concept out of a fondness for snappy neologisms, but because I have found it illuminating. If linguistic anthropology purports to be about “talking culture” (Moerman 1988), then the approach signalled by culturespeak is about “*talking up* culture”. Culture, in short, becomes the rhetorical topic under scrutiny and the valuations placed upon it are assessed. As a result, culture serves both as a frame for analysis and as a descriptive term for the phenomenon concerned. Some slippage between these two levels is

probably inescapable, given Hannerz's point that anthropologists and other social scientists must bear much of the responsibility for the growth of culturalist rhetoric in non-academic contexts. The evidence of such slippage has to do with the fact that not all the phenomena he analyses receive the "culture" label (for example, the "clash-of-civilisations" thesis). But there is arguably a conceptual linkage to other matters he clearly labels as "culture" so I am not inclined to quibble with the occasional looseness of his approach. It is better to include phenomena than to exclude them at this stage of analysis.

"Culturespeak" works as a fruitful heuristic device for inspecting the field of New Zealand public discourse, because it focuses our direct attention on the polysemous ways people talk about the concept. An important opening generalisation follows from this: *at the level of speech, New Zealand is a multicultural society*. New Zealand is a society in which culture is talked about incessantly and in which, therefore, public discourse in New Zealand is *multi-"cultural"* (that is, "multiply cultured"), whether the speakers of such a discourse are proponents of biculturalism, multiculturalism, monoculturalism, some confused mixture of any or all of the above, or any other form of culturespeak. That New Zealand is also multicultural in ways more conventionally understood is not the immediate issue here. Assertions about whether New Zealand is "really" bicultural or "really" multicultural often tell us more about the author than they do about their ostensible topic.

Of course, as Senka Božić-Vrbančić demonstrates in her paper for this volume, there are other levels of analysis appropriate to the phenomena of New Zealand "culturalisms", in particular the many fantasies, repressions and forgettings that they entail. To adopt and adapt a certain terminology from her, however, in practices of New Zealand-speak, biculturalism (the TWO) is only ONE of MANY. I have also proposed elsewhere a different, though perhaps complementary, analysis of biculturalism as the official ideology of The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Goldsmith 2003).

The phenomena I address in this paper converge with concerns in recent European anthropology and social commentary. When Hannerz coined the term "culturespeak", he did so in an essay arising from his perception that culture is no longer an elite concept used primarily by intellectuals and artists. It is, instead, "just about everywhere" (1999:393). This assertion is in turn reminiscent of Norwegian anthropologist Unni Wikan's claim that culture is "loose on the streets" (1999:57) and of another Norwegian anthropologist Verena Stolcke's assertion that "notions of culture and

cultural difference... have become ubiquitous" (1995:1). All of these commentators imply that the ubiquity and restlessness of the culture concept is problematic, with Wikan taking the strongest view of the resulting dangers. It is true that the anthropological idea of culture can be abused and distorted by lack of precision and that lack of restraint in its usage may create political risks, but there are equal dangers in anthropologists' policing of boundaries. According to the views just quoted, culture as a *resource* may be allowed (reluctantly?) to run free, partly because it allows anthropologists and other cultural analysts to justify their existence by giving them something to analyse. But culture as a *topic* must remain an anthropological preserve. The diffusion of that latter aspect of culture into other speech communities has somehow become a problem. It is almost as though that there is only one pure definition of the analytical term culture and that (self-) reflection on anthropological concepts should be carried out only by social scientists.

In the end, Hannerz's justification for his essay was to call attention to the need to "keep a critical eye on the varieties of culturespeak both among ourselves [i.e., social scientists] and in society at large—and try to blow our whistles when usage seems questionable or even pernicious" (1999:396). I concur with that approach to some extent but wish to emphasise that, from a certain perspective, "culture" (like "race") escaped from the disciplinary toolbox a long time ago and there is no chance of reclaiming it for anthropologists' exclusive use (and, of course, they did not invent the term in the first place). In fact, as soon as anthropologists used the term culture in their teaching and public commentaries, it could not remain anthropological property. All such powerful shorthand terms are routinely thrown into uncontrollable trajectories that wrench them out of academic contexts into lay ones and, after saturating them in everyday populism, drop them straight back into the professional lexicon. The fact that such complex recycling takes place is predictable even though the forms in which it occurs can remain a constant source of surprise.

In such an open-ended situation, we need concepts that do not force social thought into procrustean beds. That is why I find the notion of culturespeak stimulating. The protean and multifarious meanings of culture have at best what Wittgenstein termed a "family resemblance", a resemblance in which A resembles B, B resembles C, C resembles D, but A and D may have little or nothing in common. Such a family of concepts is "a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing" (Wittgenstein 1958:32). In the case of culturespeak, this family may be linked by no criterion other than the term "culture" itself.

CULTURESPEAK AS A EUROPEAN AND GLOBAL MODEL

Even that one small concession to uniformity is debatable, if we follow Hannerz's lead. He trawls through a number of usages that pertain specifically to the present-day European situation. Some of them have clear counterparts in New Zealand, though often with a distinctive twist. Let me deal briefly, however, with two uses on his list that do *not* resonate quite as strongly in the New Zealand context as they do in Europe and further afield. I refer first to the "clash-of-civilisations" thesis, stemming from the work of Samuel Huntington (Huntington 1996, Harrison and Huntington 2000), which postulates a global showdown between pluralist democracy (the "West") and repressive collectivism (various incarnations of "the Other"). The relative absence of such concerns in New Zealand, even in the aftermath of "September 11" and its attendant global alliance-building against terrorism, may reflect this country's minor role in international relations and its diplomatic attempts to consciously cast itself as a mediator and peacekeeper.

Interestingly, Hannerz does not comment on the similarity between the "clash-of-civilisations" debate and a notion he focuses on later—culture shock—that seems to replicate at the level of the shocked individual one form of the global clash Huntington portrays in his account. Hannerz's concern, rather, is to map the growth of the "culture shock prevention industry", particularly in the world of business corporations. While this industry is relatively undeveloped in New Zealand, it is reminiscent of the state's distinctive forms of cultural diplomacy, where the relationship between Māori and Pakeha² has become an administrative template for encounters with the leaders and people of Pacific island countries. This is not a topic I have space to deal with here at length, but it is definitely and fascinatingly implicated in the New Zealand rhetoric of biculturalism, as well as in this country's contest with Australia for influence in the island Pacific (see McGhie 2002).

One of New Zealand's most potent weapons for wielding such influence is the (aptly named) "culture group", a troupe skilled in aspects of Māori performance culture, especially of the dance forms known as *haka*. Such troupes perform on a wide variety of occasions, including displays of national identity before foreign dignitaries. Even though only a small group of elite performers might be expected to know a large repertoire, in the military all New Zealand servicemen and women on overseas detachment, both Māori and Pakeha, are expected to perform *haka*, usually under Māori leadership. Since the armed forces have a significant role in development work (transport, construction, health delivery, etc.), this proclivity is well

known in the Pacific. Australia may have a larger aid budget and a more powerful military, but for winning grassroots support in the Pacific, New Zealand's proficiency in "indigenous" song and dance styles carries the day—or so New Zealand officials like to think.

Another expression of Hannerz's litany of culturespeak in Europe is "cultural celebrationism", which he sees as having its institutional locus in a "cultural sector" sponsored both by corporations and by various departments of government. While there are clear New Zealand analogues to the examples he had in mind, such as a burgeoning cultural heritage movement with strong links to the tourism industry, again I only mention one example of the role such a cultural sector plays.³ Ruth Harley, a powerful local exponent and controller of funding in this sector,⁴ has extolled its importance as follows: "The cultural sector has an enormous amount to offer the rest in New Zealand. It is a crucible for other sectors such as trade, international and race relations. It creates new types of 'glue' between New Zealanders" (Harley 1994:83). This statement from the mid-1990s could be read as a nostalgic appeal for culture to play an integrative and resistant role in response to the neoliberal hegemony of the preceding decade. Such a reading is misleading. Of course, a readiness to reduce culture to its economic justifications predates the New Right revolution of 1984, but the move to justify a consciously created culture as the foundation of a society whose existing communitarian traditions were steamrolled in the late 1980s is a classic neoliberal device. Harley does add a rider that "one of the downsides of the economic revolution has been the dissolving of the glue" (1994:83). But the very idea of *culture as glue* derives its force from the prior assumption of an atomised collection of individuals, and my reading is reinforced by Harley's praise for the "invigorating" effects of the new economy and her stated preference for the character of post-1984 New Zealand (Harley 1994:84).

CULTURAL FUNDAMENTALISM, BICULTURALISM AND MULTICULTURALISM

Two other aspects of Hannerz's framework are more crucial to my immediate argument. The first is cultural fundamentalism, a term introduced by Verena Stolcke (1995) in order to shed light on exclusionist and anti-immigration politics in continental Europe. Michael Jackson has used the concept to regret the influence of such intolerance on the treatment of refugees in New Zealand (1999). The fundamentalism in question denotes the use of cultural identity to deny people asylum and migration rights into New Zealand, because of the way in which newcomers might upset

a delicate cultural balance. In short, he argues that the good intentions of biculturalism may result in injustice.

The other kind of culturespeak on Hannerz's list of direct relevance to New Zealand is multiculturalism, which he defines as "a self-conscious preoccupation with cultural difference and collective identity" (Hannerz 1999:347). As a description of, or prescription for, cultural pluralism, "multiculturalism" has largely been displaced in New Zealand public discourse by the concept of "biculturalism" which is organised around the treaty-based relationship between Māori and Pakeha. In fact, multiculturalism and biculturalism are widely regarded as politically antagonistic, incompatible or at the very least unequal (Pearson 1991, 2001:119, 151; but cf Bishop 1992).

Even so, these two complexes of ideas have some theoretical affinity, and there is a historical relation between them. They form a pattern in the New Zealand imaginary, along with repressed notions like "monoculturalism", which almost no one directly defends, but which is arguably more real for most New Zealanders.

One way of managing the contradictions between biculturalism and multiculturalism has been to construct them as a sequence. A logical sequence may be implied, but usually the chronological order in which they should be addressed in the political arena is the explicit sequence. To put it bluntly, biculturalism comes first and multiculturalism second (if at all). The new Race Relations Commissioner has used exactly that turn of phrase, justifying it on the grounds that "[w]e have to be clear about what we want as a nation before we can start defining our multiculturalism" (Monsalve 2002:33; see May 2002). It is intriguing that this sort of rhetoric often *implicitly* recognises multiculturalism as always already existing, while stating that its *official* recognition must constantly be deferred. In fact, within the present dispensation, it is difficult to see how multiculturalism could ever gain official status. Doing so would imply that the conditions that sustain biculturalism have been transcended. Obtaining agreement that such closure has been reached would be a daunting task. This is not to say that multiculturalism will never become official ideology or that having it in place would resolve all difficulties (Hage 1998). An administration antipathetic to biculturalism could, in theory, simply mandate a change of discourse, as political parties in New Zealand's small unicameral system of government have succeeded in doing in the past. But multiculturalism is unlikely to emerge as an official "successor" to biculturalism on the grounds that the latter project has been accomplished. That simply does not follow from the founding premises of biculturalism.

Elizabeth Rata (2000a) has mounted an attack against what she calls “culturalism”⁵ *per se* which could apply to both biculturalism and multiculturalism. It is intended mostly, though, to call into question the “failed Pakeha project” of biculturalism,⁶ in a manner reminiscent of Jackson’s dissection of cultural fundamentalism. For Rata, culturalist theories are those that “explain group division in terms of ethnic or cultural or religious difference” (2000a:2). Indeed, in her view they are racist but disguise that racism under a veneer of spirituality. However, where Jackson sees such fundamentalism as inimical to a genuine appreciation of common humanity and of the suffering experienced by asylum seekers, Rata’s rejection of culture stems from a neo-Marxist view that it mystifies class relations of exploitation and justifies the power of a neo-tribal Māori elite (2000b, 2000c). While respectful of the strength and clarity of her position, I remain unconvinced that we can dismiss the concept of culture so easily, as a kind of false consciousness. It is simply too useful.

THE EMERGENCE OF CULTURAL AUDIT

In the open-minded spirit of Hannerz’s essay, we should add other examples of culturespeak to the list. One form, strongly linked to biculturalism in New Zealand, is called in policy statements the “cultural audit” (e.g., Durie 1994:15). Unintentionally but suggestively, this phrase evokes and reverses the title of a book edited by Marilyn Strathern, *Audit Cultures* (2000). In timely fashion, that volume inspected the topic of audit as a cultural practice, which is perhaps the quintessential cultural practice of neoliberalism. But none of the case studies therein mentions “cultural audit” in the specifically New Zealand sense.⁷

Cultural audit is concerned with how institutions may be monitored for their adherence to various cultural standards—notably, for instance, to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. This connects to some legal interpretations of the Treaty principles that stress the requirement of “accountability”, as well as “partnership” and “participation”. Moreover, the Treaty is capable of continually generating new forms of culturespeak, such as the notion of “cultural redress” recently coined as part of the Tuwharetoa Ki Kawerau agreement with the Crown. Cultural redress apparently refers to an area set up in a wildlife reserve “to provide access to traditional food sources” (NZH 2002c).

Some of these new forms are no doubt guilty of the sort of culturalism Rata excoriates. Certain dangers are apparent, for example, in the particular version of audit known as “cultural safety”, which I have subjected to critique elsewhere (Goldsmith n.d.). Mason Durie (1994) provides a

representative definition: "Cultural safety for Maori means that providers will be sufficiently familiar with Maori culture, beliefs and values to eliminate the risk of inappropriate practices which cause offence or marginalise participation on cultural grounds". Wisely, he concedes "that cultural safety measures are imperfect and that discussion... has not yet progressed to the point where there is total agreement either as to its necessity or to the level of application" (Durie 1994:15). Unfortunately, the lack of consensus has not stood in the way of its widespread application.

Cultural audit has very real consequences. In September 2000, the Northland Emergency Services Trust (a helicopter rescue service) was threatened with the loss of its contracts with the Accident Rehabilitation Compensation and Insurance Corporation because of a failure to show that its services were "culturally appropriate" (Jackson 2000). By all accounts, this was not a case of gross cultural insensitivity, but one of filling out the contract forms incorrectly or incompletely. Also, the Trust chairman said, "the helicopter had been twice blessed by Maori". In sum, if the critique of culturalism risks an under-valuation of culture, the institution of cultural audit, like cultural celebrationism, represents an overvaluation.

So far, cultural audit is applied only to certain spheres of action where public policy makers or bureaucrats set the rules. According to some commentators, the private sector may not be exempt forever. If so and at least initially, the spread of cultural audit in business is likely to take place on a voluntary basis and as an extension of the movement towards broader forms of accounting. In New Zealand, a select number of sympathetic chief executives are leading the charge. They argue for the need to include environmental and social responsibility as modes of accounting, thus producing in conjunction with economic returns the so-called "triple bottom line". But wait, there is more. Beyond the economic, environmental and social bottom lines, there's a fourth, the *cultural*. French President Jacques Chirac is reported to have spoken in favour of this quadruple system of accounting at the September 2002 Earth Summit in Johannesburg and New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark was reported to have been taken with the idea. The political commentator Colin James notes, however, "[i]n New Zealand 'cultural' implies something much more than in France, which has a dominant national culture, developed over centuries. Bicultural New Zealand, with its Treaty of Waitangi, potentially makes quadruple bottom line reporting extremely complex. Whose cultures are being reported on? And how are the impacts to be assessed?" (James 2002). And what is culture, that it can be audited in this fashion?

DIVISIONS OF CULTURAL LABOUR

Debates over the value of culture are clearly important in contemporary New Zealand. Universities are not exempt from this and another pertinent example of culturespeak concerns the name of the academic unit housing the Anthropology Programme at the University of Waikato where I work. It is called the Division of *Cultural* and Environmental Studies. In late 1997 and early 1998, members of my Programme entered negotiations with their Geography colleagues in order to establish a combined grouping. Our actions may have looked like an obedient response to an outbreak of managerialist merger mania by faculty leaders of the time, but they were in fact intended to leave the constituent parts with more autonomy than the managers thought wise. The “cultural” half of our name was designed to signal the inclusion of anthropology and cultural geography (as well as to connote an openness of some academics in the unit to the burgeoning movement of cultural studies worldwide). The “environmental” half of the name was intended to signal the presence of the other geographers, such as those teaching Geographical Information Systems and resource and environmental planning. The allied small Tourism Studies Programme straddled both sides of the name, though most of its activities fall under the “cultural” rubric.

When the new name, Division of Cultural and Environmental Studies, was first put to a meeting of all the people concerned, it met unexpected resistance from certain members of the Geography staff. Two young Māori women academics objected to the term “cultural”. Neither provided a lengthy explanation for their stance, but it seemed to me that for them the word conjured up the bounded, static and male-dominated “tradition” that is the canonical sense of culture in much of the Māori world and certainly that of many Pakeha representations of that world. Once those of us who had backed the use of the name clarified the looser and less prescriptive concept of culture in anthropology and cultural studies, they withdrew their objection. I doubt that either staff member had heard the term “cultural fundamentalism” at that time, which predated Michael Jackson’s introduction of the term to the New Zealand literature. But as indigenous academics outside the mainstream of Māori studies, they seemed suspicious of the fundamentalist uses to which culture can be put.

Māori spirituality has, in fact, become entrenched as part of New Zealand national public culture. In 2001, a rightwing Member of Parliament, Rodney Hide of the ACT Party, criticised the Labour-led coalition government for funding overseas trips by *kaumatua* (Māori elders skilled in ritual and cultural protocol) to carry out the “spiritual cleansing” of New Zealand offices in Bangkok (NZH 2001). Such practices are explicitly a form of

cultural diplomacy to which I alluded earlier. Hide argued that the activity was not “cultural” but “religious”, and that it was “religious hocus-pocus” to boot. A conservative commentator and wealthy businessman, Bob Jones, called it “witchcraft” (Jones 2001). Hide claimed that the practice entailed belief in “a primitive view that there are spirits in buildings which need to be exorcised” (NZH 2001). As an anthropologist, what offends me in his statement is not just the racism of his accusation of primitivism that is clearly intended to appeal to ACT’s redneck constituency, but his assumption that religion is not part of culture. Ironically, he was not alone in that assumption, as the religion/culture contrast was equally strongly *affirmed* by a supporter of such taxpayer-funded trips by *kaumatua*. A senior Māori leader, Sir Graham Latimer, was reported to have said that “[t]he ceremony was cultural, not religious—two different things” (NZH 2001).

In any event, the deployment of Māori cultural practitioners to legitimise New Zealand’s diplomatic efforts will continue for at least the foreseeable future under the rule of governments led by either Labour or National. It is an unchallengeable tenet of orthodox biculturalism. Even Hide implicitly recognised that he could not question the policy on cultural grounds; rather it was the policy’s supposedly *illegitimate* appeal to culture, because it was religion, that drew his ire. He seemed to accept, for public consumption, the theory underlying the version of culturespeak promulgated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. He simply did not accept its application to this particular case.

RIGHTS, CULTURALLY SPEAKING

At the other end of the scale of cultural capital, culturespeak crops up in new strategies to curb youth crime. In early 2002, the New Zealand government set aside funds to set up two pilot centres for “day-reporting” by young probationary convicts. If these proved successful, others were to be set up around the country. As well as testing surveillance technology, such as electronic ankle tags and curfews, they will feature “compulsory culturally-based programmes” (Young 2002). The justification provided for these programmes was, according to the Corrections Minister, that “60 per cent of youth offenders [are] Maori and up to 10 per cent Pacific Islanders”. The newspaper report does not say if “culturally-based” programmes would be set up for young Pakeha offenders, but I am confident that they will not. This example illustrates two longstanding aspects of New Zealand culturespeak: that Māori culture is therapy for the ills of Māori society, especially of its alienated youth (Wetherell and Potter 1992), and that Pakeha don’t have culture.

Or do they? There is some ambiguity on this point. In a report on another jailhouse matter (Gardiner 2001), the recommendation by a food expert (conducting a food audit, no less) that “putting fish and chips back on the menu in prisons... is a ‘cultural requirement’ not being met by the Corrections Department”. In fact, the headlines diverted attention away from the actual wording of the recommendation which stated that “[t]he major cultural requirements not being met are for fish and chips and wholegrain bread”. But the prospect of inmates receiving New Zealanders’ favourite takeaway food as a cultural right was always going to be the newsworthy aspect of this story. Indeed, a senior bureaucrat in the Department attempted clarification by saying that he presumed “cultural” meant that fish and chips is “an icon type of food”.

The encouraging thing, anthropologically speaking, is to see food recognised as cultural. The depressing thing, anthropologically speaking, is that only certain marked foods are recognised as cultural. And the danger, anthropologically speaking, is that culture becomes a catch-all term in matters of legal and political negotiation. Here, as elsewhere, my interest lies less in the fact of culture being used to justify policy than in the meanings and images of culture that such policies and discourses tacitly invoke.

Appeals to culture always carry weight in public discourse, but they are not guaranteed success. A landmark legal case demonstrates that the place of culture can be contested. Let me note, by way of background, that New Zealand law for the time being still allows parents to administer physical punishment to their children, to the level of “reasonable smacking”. There was a period when that right received an explicitly cultural sanction. In 1984, the case of *Erick v Police* upheld the propriety of paying regard “to the cultural characteristics of the parent and the family as a measure of what is reasonable in all the circumstances” (Somerville 1998:78). In other words, beatings could vary in severity according to the cultural standards accepted by the ethnic community in question. But in the 1996 case of *Ausage v Ausage*, Judge Somerville reversed this decision. A young New Zealand-resident Samoan woman sought a final protection order against her father, claiming that his use of force when disciplining her had been excessive and therefore amounted to domestic violence. The judge granted her request, noting that since the earlier judgment New Zealand had ratified the UN convention on the rights of the child. Parents are still allowed to use reasonable force, but that will not be allowed to differ “according to ethnic background or religious belief. There is to be one universal standard which applies to all families in New Zealand” (Somerville 1998:79).

Nevertheless, cultural rights are alive and well in culturespeak, if nowhere else (see, e.g., Wilson and Hunt 2000). Unni Wikan concluded her lament

for the promiscuity of culture in contemporary Norway with the argument that anthropologists, and the governments they advise, should abandon the idea of cultural rights in favour of a firm commitment to universal human rights based on the dignity of the individual (1999:63-64). I do not know if the Norwegian state has accepted this recommendation, though she implied that the tide was turning in its favour. The New Zealand debate has clearly not been resolved and is unlikely to be so for decades, if at all. On reflection, I suspect this will be true for Norway as well. One reason for this is that when people discuss cultural rights there is an almost palpable relief at being able to focus on “rights” as opposed to the hard task of defining what they mean by “cultural”.⁸

CULTURESPEAK AND JUSTICE

Indeed, so long as New Zealand officially espouses its particular version of biculturalism, policies inflected by culturespeak may be inescapable. Consider Australian, European, or US-style multiculturalisms with their demographically grounded commitment to providing resources and representation to new or hitherto unacknowledged minorities. On that kind of model (which I have drastically oversimplified for reasons of space), cultural change is supposed to occur through a kind of osmosis, by placing different groups into proximity and often into competition with one another. The dominant cultural system is not directly challenged and nor is the state, which is supposed to mediate disinterestedly among all groups.

Biculturalism, by contrast, is always a dialectic in which the cultures at stake either engage in an explicit struggle for cultural hegemony (as perhaps, in Canada) or settle on a mutually defining division of cultural labour (as in contemporary New Zealand). Whichever version applies, biculturalism is always liable to culturalise the situation, whereas in, say, the United States culture looks more like an epiphenomenon of legal and political arrangements of the state. American pluralism has clearly been based on this way of conceiving difference and commitment to equality of opportunity. Contrary to some critics of biculturalism, I think this foregrounding of culture as a topic is valuable, if risky, provided it helps to keep open the horizons of cultural identity. Where it serves to close them down and culture becomes a fundamentalism, dangers loom.

Biculturalism takes for granted the priority within a variegated cultural universe of two primary cultures. In New Zealand, one term in that pair is moderately well defined and marked. In terms of the division of cultural labour and a number of other deployments of culturespeak discussed earlier, there is a robust official role for Māori culture in New Zealand, even if who

or what actually constitutes that culture is hotly contested and the dualisms that biculturalism produces may be questioned (see Benton 2002).

What about the second culture in the equation, the Pakeha? Defining Pakeha culture is so difficult that few attempt it and no-one's efforts have attained widespread acceptance. For politicians, leaving the matter vague is the safest option. But the notion of biculturalism assumes that such a meaning exists, even though the official version of biculturalism entails that the culture itself be culture-free, so as not to complicate matters.

How does all this relate to justice? One way of answering that question is to say that the ills of colonialism are not automatically redressed by resorting to the politics of cultural identity, however forcefully argued or well meant. This is not just a matter of saying that, in the quest for justice, a "politics of redistribution" has been unjustifiably trumped by a trendy new "politics of recognition" (Fraser 1995, 1999). This critique refers to the complaint by some commentators that contemporary obsessions with cultural identity have blunted and even obscured harder problems of poverty and class-based oppression. Elizabeth Rata's critique of culturalism seems to take such a stance against identity politics, but the debate is more than an in-house academic argument. This was shown by the sidelining of the Labour policy officially announced as "closing the gaps". The policy aimed at reducing the degree of economic, legal and health deprivation experienced by Māori in comparison to Pakeha on the same indicators. When one policy analyst, Simon Chapple, produced data showing that the main differences between rich and poor in New Zealand correlated less to ethnicity than to other factors, the coalition government led by Labour distanced itself from his findings (Chapple 2000). Elizabeth Rata (2000c) went even further and maintained that the policy was responsible for "*constructing* gaps" that disguised class commonalities between Māori and Pakeha.

My personal view is that both sorts of politics are needed and that, for too long, matters of "redistribution" took taken-for-granted priority over matters of "recognition". If the latter now occasionally dominate at the expense of traditional "bread-and-butter" issues, then the balance will swing back in due course. In the meantime, it is crucial to acknowledge that each kind of politics is susceptible to reification, both the politics based on assertions of cultural identity and the politics based on presumed class solidarity. But while there is a long history of scepticism towards extravagant claims for class-based politics, even by those sympathetic to its goals, the tools for subjecting identity politics to similar dissection are still in the process of being forged.

Make no mistake, it is extremely difficult to think outside the orthodox discourse in contemporary theorising on New Zealand society. Even sophisticated liberal commentators see universities, in their role of the “critic and conscience of society”, as having the duty not to radically question biculturalism but, rather, the “special responsibility” to contribute suggestions as to “how can the policy be both developed and implemented” (Wilson and Yeatman 1995:xv).

So, who talks up culture and to what purpose? Official ideologies like biculturalism as well as unofficial ones like multiculturalism generally bypass the hard issues of how to define culture in the first place and how to investigate its use in language. By this I mean not just the language of elites who have a vested interest in containing the meanings of culture within convenient limits, but also the everyday languages of actors whose agendas need to be understood rather than ignored by states. Even though I support many of the goals of biculturalism, that does not justify a refusal to analyse official and unreflexive uses of the term “culture”. Justice will ultimately be better served by such scrutiny than by heedless support for unreflexive policies.

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NOTES

1. Thus, New Zealand still has a Race Relations Commissioner, despite that fact that a recent name change from Race Relations Conciliator provided an opportunity to do away with the term “race”—a term that makes the newly appointed Commissioner, Joris de Bres, “uncomfortable”. His rephrasing of the role as “a barometer of inter-cultural relations” accords nicely with my argument (Monsalve 2002).

2. I define “Pakeha” here as the descendants of the mainly British settler population in whose name the Treaty of Waitangi was signed in 1840. Sometimes quaintly equated with “[New Zealand] European” or even ‘Caucasian’, the term has its own special cultural and political resonance in debates over ethnicity in New Zealand, but these are too complex to discuss here.
3. But see the “Briefing to the Incoming Minister of Broadcasting: Hon. Steve Maharey” (August 2002), prepared by officials of the Ministry of Culture and Heritage. This can be downloaded at <http://www.mch.govt.nz/publications/bim/index.html>
4. At the moment of writing, she is chief executive of the New Zealand Film Commission, having previously been involved in the quango Creative New Zealand.
5. Rata’s theoretically complex analysis of the term needs to be distinguished from apparently similar but more descriptive uses, as when, for example, Pearson (2001:145) refers to both multiculturalism and biculturalism as “culturalisms”. The cover term saves him from having to repeat the twin components in their full form. By so doing, however, he fails to keep in view their distinct qualities in the New Zealand context.
6. Calling it a Pakeha project, of course, is usefully provocative but somewhat unfair, since it is precisely the benefits that accrue to some Maori that sustain it as a viable policy of government.
7. New Zealand academic Eleanor Rimoldi (2000) did contribute a useful essay to Strathern’s volume, but it addresses the internationally recognised issues of audit faced by universities, rather than “cultural audit” in the sense mentioned here.
8. A clue to why this is may be found in the almost palpable relief that some proponents of cultural rights display at being able to switch their focus to “rights” after struggling with definitions of “culture”. Konai Helu Thaman, for example, neatly sidesteps the issue by stating that cultural rights are “the collective rights of a (cultural) group” (2000:3)—which of course avoids describing the substance of that which the rights are said to be mobilised on behalf of.